

We, of course, reiterated the friendship and the cordiality between Nigeria and the United States. And of course, I am happy to be able to make a friend of President Bush, just as you heard President Bush had made a friend of me. I now can feel that if there is any need to call on President Bush, he knows what I look like. [*Laughter*] I am not a no-person to him. He knows how I smile. He may even be feeling how I look on telephone. [*Laughter*]

And that is one important thing, that we made contact. We established a relationship, and we are friends.

Thank you very much.

President Bush. Mr. President, thank you very much. It's an honor for you to be here.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:01 p.m. at the South Portico at the White House. President Obasanjo referred to President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa; President Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria; President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt; and President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal.

The President's News Conference

May 11, 2001

The President. Good afternoon. First, let me begin by talking about how pleased I am that a budget has been agreed upon. And it's now time for the Congress to act quickly. It's time for the Congress to pass meaningful, real tax reform, and I urge them to do so before Memorial Day.

Tax relief will be good for our economy, but tax relief is also a very important way to help deal with high energy prices. And so the Congress needs to act. I'm confident if they have the will to do so, that they can, that they can get this done before Memorial Day.

And secondly, I believe strongly that the Attorney General made the right decision today. Any time we're preparing to carry out the death penalty, we have a solemn obligation to make sure that the case has been handled in full accordance with all the guarantees of our Constitution. The very foundations of our democracy depend on our ability to assure our citizens that in all criminal cases, and especially in the death penalty,

defendants have been treated fairly. This decision is going to create some frustration amongst people whose lives were destroyed and turned upside-down by Mr. McVeigh. But it is very important for our country to make sure that in death penalty cases, people are treated fairly.

I'll be glad to answer some questions, starting with Mr. Fournier [Ron Fournier, Associated Press].

Timothy McVeigh

Q. Mr. President, thank you, sir. Attorney General Ashcroft, on the topic you were just talking about, said, "There is no doubt in my mind, or anyone's mind, about the death of Timothy McVeigh."

First, as someone who signed 152 death warrants in Texas, do you agree that there is no doubt that McVeigh is guilty? And secondly, did Louis Freeh know about these documents when he tendered his resignation?

The President. Mr. Freeh, Director Freeh never brought this up to me. I found out about this last evening. My conversation with Mr. Freeh, when he came and said he was leaving—the subject never came up.

Secondly, Mr. McVeigh himself has admitted to the crime. Mr. McVeigh, as I recall, said he did it, and I take him for his word.

Q. Mr. President?

The President. Actually, I've been given an order. You're second, Steve [Steve Holland, Reuters].

Gasoline Prices

Q. Mr. President, thank you very much, sir. A lot of families are struggling to pay for gasoline at record prices. What can you do to help them in the short term? Will your energy report address that? And do you agree with your Energy Secretary, that OPEC bears some responsibility for these prices?

The President. The price of crude oil has got something to do with the price of gasoline but not nearly as much as the fact that we haven't built a refinery in years. What this Nation needs to do is to build more refining capacity. And we're prepared to work with the industry to encourage capital development, capital to be deployed to develop more refining capacity. And that may require us

to analyze all regulations that discourage development.

But the best way to make sure that people are able to deal with high energy prices is to cut taxes, is to give people more of their own money so they can meet the bills, so they can meet the high energy prices.

I'm not so sure you're it next. Gregory [David Gregory, NBC News]. You're soon.

Q. Mr. President, can I follow up on that point?

The President. Yes.

Q. Your party in the past has argued in favor of either suspending or rolling back the Federal gasoline tax. Will you consider doing either? And secondly, what would you say to American families who may pay as much as \$3 at the pump this summer, at the same time that oil companies in this country are experiencing and enjoying record profits?

The President. What I say is, I worry about the fact that hard-working people are paying high prices at the pump. It concerns me a lot. And therefore, the Congress needs to cut taxes as quickly as possible, to give people money to be able to deal with this situation.

I also say, we need to build more refining capacity. We need more supply. We need to meet the increasing demands with better supply. I'm optimistic in the long term, not only will we increase supplies but that our automobiles will become more technologically adept at dealing with the energy situation now. In other words, we'll have new types of automobiles, hybrids.

And in the energy plan I'm going to be discussing, you'll see some incentives for hybrid automobiles. But the quickest way to get money in people's pockets to deal with prices is tax relief.

Bill Plante [CBS News].

Q. Mr. President, are you really going to let Republicans in Congress go home for the next recess without some kind of other short-term relief? You know the Democrats are after you and the Vice President, saying you're a couple of former oil men protecting the industry. Would you at least support the Republican bill in the House which would ease some emission standards in California?

The President. Back to David's question, I'll listen to everybody's suggestions. But I

want to remind the Members of Congress, both Republican and Democrat, all of us are concerned about high energy prices and prices at the gas pump being too high. Let's get the tax relief done and do it quickly.

I hope there is no intention to delay. There needs to be money in the pockets of our consumers as quickly as possible. We've got the wherewithal to do so. But as to suggestions, I'm open minded for any suggestions somebody may have.

Q. What about that emissions—

The President. I'll look at all options. But the clearest way to get things done quickly is tax relief.

Now, the American people have got to understand that this is a situation that's going to require some long-term planning to get the situation in hand for the—to have a stable future. There is no such thing as immediate supply. This is a situation that's been developing over the years, and it's going to take a while to correct.

The quickest way to help people with their energy bills is tax relief. That is the quickest, surest way to do so.

Q. All options, including the gas tax, sir?

The President. If anybody thinks they've got a good idea, I'll listen. But for certain, what needs to happen is additional refining capacity, as well as tax relief.

Yes, Terry [Terry Moran, ABC News].

Death Penalty

Q. Mr. President, 51 percent of the American people now, according to a recent poll, support a moratorium on executions; and support for the penalty in general has dropped considerably over the past couple years. Does what happened in the McVeigh case, coupled with the more than 75 people now who have been released from death row when evidence of their actual innocence came to light, does all of that lead you to reflect at all on the fairness and the accuracy of the death penalty and the way it's actually administered day to day?

The President. Well, I am pleased to be able to report, as for the first case that came to my desk at the Federal Government, that my administration is going to take its time to make sure that justice has been administered fairly.

Q. But do you reflect at all on the general accuracy and fairness of the death penalty, and the way it actually works day to day?

The President. As Mr. Fournier brought up, I was the Governor of a State that had a death penalty, and as far as I was concerned, I reviewed every case, and I was confident that every person that had been put to death received full rights and was guilty of the crime charged.

Q. So no second thoughts about the death penalty?

The President. Not as far as I'm concerned, so long as the system provides fairness. And today is an example of the system being fair.

Major [Major Garrett, Cable News Network].

Repeal of the Gas Tax

Q. Mr. President, on the question of repealing the gas tax, even some Republicans have questioned the leadership and the clarity of voice from this White House about what they should do. I've talked to several Republican leaders who have said the White House has said, "Look, if you can figure out a way to pass it, we'll say it's okay, but we're not going to propose it." And what they say is, "If the White House would say they're for it, it would be easier for us to pass it."

Can you tell the American people right now—

The President. Major, I can tell—let me say it again, see if I can be more clear. To the Congress, who is interested in helping consumers pay high gas prices, pass the tax relief as quickly as possible. We've set aside \$100 billion to help consumers with high energy prices. That's the quickest way to help consumers. I am deeply concerned about consumers, I am deeply concerned about high gas prices.

To anybody who wants to figure out how to help the consumers, pass the tax relief package as quickly as possible.

Jim [Jim Angle, FOX News].

Oversight of the Federal Bureau of Investigation

Q. Mr. President, there are a number of people, including Senator Leahy, who was here today, who are suggesting that there

needs to be much tighter oversight of the FBI. Aside from the McVeigh matter, there have been a number of things over the years—the FBI labs, the Hanssen case, and a number of other things. Do you believe it's time for a more sweeping look at what is going on at the FBI?

The President. There are two looks at what's happening in the FBI. One, of course, is the commission that Louis Freeh put together, headed by Judge Webster. I'm confident that that commission will take a full look at the proceedings within the FBI, as to regards to security matters.

And secondly, the Attorney General is going to be conducting an investigation as to why the documents were not given to Mr. McVeigh's lawyers. And I look forward to seeing what those findings reveal.

Yes, ma'am.

Energy Resources

Q. Mr. President, to follow up on energy. You're developing closer relations with Nigeria, Mexico, and Canada. Could you use your leverage with these countries to have them convince Saudi Arabia to open the spigots and provide more fuel?

The President. The reason why we have a problem at the gas pump at this particular moment in history is because we haven't built any refining capacity. When you don't increase supplies of a commodity and demand continues to increase, the price is going to go up.

And so our Nation must expand refining capacity. And we've got to do that within our hemisphere. Otherwise, when you transport refined product from far distances, it doesn't meet market tests. So we need more refining capacity.

I am working with Canada and Mexico to increase the supply, particularly of natural gas. We have a serious situation in the State of California, as you're very aware. We've been working with the officials of California to expedite the development of new electric generating capacity.

We're also doing our part as a good citizen to reduce demand for electricity in peak hours. But the new plants that are being brought on stream in California are going to be driven by natural gas. And we need more

natural gas to make sure there is fuel for those plants.

So I am working with Mexico and I am working with Canada to try to figure out ways for us to encourage exploration in our own neighborhood. I had a good discussion today with the President of Nigeria, who is talking about increasing their amount of production, coming from Nigeria. That is positive news for U.S. consumers. The more supply on the market, the lower—the less pressure there will be on price.

Ron [Ron Hutcherson, Knight Ridder].

National Economy

Q. Given what's going on with energy prices and the difficulties in the economy, can you assure the American people at the start of your term that they'll be better off at the end of it than they are today? And if they're not, should they blame you?

The President. Well, I certainly hope they're better off. There's no question that the minute I got elected, the storm clouds on the horizon were getting nearly directly overhead. In other words, the economic news started to deteriorate.

The truth of the matter is, the market started to adjust March of last year. In other words, the so-called downturn has been in the making for a while. I believe with good policy from the Fed, as well as good fiscal policy, that we can recover, that that robust growth we all hope for will come back. I wish I could tell you when. I'm not an economist, but if I were, I'd probably say there's a 50 percent chance it would happen soon and a 50 percent chance it wouldn't.

Q. And if it doesn't work out, does that mean it's not your fault?

The President. Listen, Presidents, whether things are good or bad, get the credit or blame. I understand that.

But Ron, I'm not really that concerned about standing in polls. I am doing what I think is the right thing to do. And the right thing to do is to have proposed a tax relief package that is an integral part of a fiscal policy that makes sense.

I proposed the plan. I campaigned on the plan. Many of you, the truth be known here, didn't actually think it was going to happen. Now there's a budget in place, \$1.25 trillion

of tax relief, coupled with 100 billion of immediate stimulus that's now available.

If I had my way, I'd have it in place tomorrow, so that people would have money in their pockets to deal with high energy prices, so people would have money in their pockets to be able to plan for the future. The Congress needs to act. I'm confident that that will help an economic recovery.

Q. Mr. President?

The President. Bob [G. Robert Hillman, Dallas Morning News].

Federal Bureau of Investigation Nomination

Q. Sir, how are the recent controversies in the FBI affecting your search for a new Director? Just what kind of person are you looking to head the FBI?

The President. We've just started, Bob. I look forward to seeing what the Webster report says. I look forward to hearing what the Attorney General says about the—about the reason why Mr. McVeigh's attorneys did not get—did not see certain documents.

And I am looking for somebody who will do a couple of things: one, enforce the law; two, keep morale high at the agency; somebody who is a good manager; and somebody who can work with the Attorney General in my administration.

Q. What's your timetable?

The President. As soon as possible. I'm not sure what that means, though, to be perfectly frank with you. I mean, we're beginning to look at different candidates, and it's a—obviously, it's a process that's going to take a while. Director Freeh assured me that the number two person there could do a good job if we took us a while to find a replacement.

Glen [Glen Johnson, Boston Globe].

Timothy McVeigh

Q. Mr. President, some of those who have interviewed Tim McVeigh say that he will actually revel in what happened today—

The President. Really?

Q. —that it will be a sign of FBI incompetence. What message should he take from this whole episode, in your mind?

The President. He should say—he's lucky to be in America, is what he ought to say,

that this is a country who will bend over backwards to make sure that his constitutional rights are guaranteed, that as opposed to rushing his fate, that the Attorney General, with my strong support, said, we better make sure that all guarantees are fulfilled. Mr. McVeigh is lucky to be in a country like this.

It's unfortunate that he would feel like revealing, at all, after what he supposedly has done. There are a lot of people's lives he affected; there are a lot of people in Oklahoma City—I went to the memorial. I got to see the faces of people, the pictures of people whose lives were lost. I talked to relatives who still weep when they think about a relative.

This isn't a time to revel.

Yes, Bruni [Frank Bruni, New York Times].

Q. But to follow up on that, what will those relatives, what will those families of victims gain? What will—how will they benefit from Timothy McVeigh's execution?

The President. Frank, you need to talk to them about that.

Q. In your opinion.

The President. Well, I can't possibly put myself in their stead.

Q. Why is his execution so important and the death penalty so important, then?

The President. Because it needs to send a signal to anybody who thinks what Timothy McVeigh did was okay, that in this society we're not going to tolerate that kind of heinous act.

But you need to talk to the—all I can tell you is, I'm sure there's going to be some frustration by the family members, by the decision that the Attorney General made, supported by me. I'm sure there will be, and we'll probably hear from them. But they must understand that we live in a country that protects certain rights. And the Attorney General did the right thing in this decision.

Mike [Mike Allen, Washington Post].

U.S. Citizens Held in China

Q. Mr. President, what is your level of concern about U.S. citizens who remain held in China, and what are you doing for them?

The President. We've sent clear signals to the Chinese that we expect our citizens that have been detained, and/or citizens who

have been detained with U.S. relatives, that we expect them to be treated fairly. And we'd like for them to have whatever due process the Chinese can offer. We have expressed our concerns. Sometimes they listen; sometimes they don't.

Our relations with China are relations that are going to be based upon a consistent message with the Chinese: One, we expect there to be trade, and I hope there is trade; but two, that we expect people to be treated fairly inside that country. And hopefully they'll respond.

Confidence in the Federal Bureau of Investigation

Q. Mr. President, is your confidence in the FBI undermined by this episode?

The President. I'm obviously concerned about an incident where documents have been misplaced. But I withhold judgment until I find out the full facts, to find out what the Attorney General's investigation finds out.

Martha [Martha Brant, Newsweek].

American Justice System

Q. Mr. President, following up on that, do you think our American justice system is healthy, or does it need fixing?

The President. I think, by and large, the system is healthy. And I think today proved why it is healthy—that ours is a Government that when found that documents hadn't been given to the defense attorney, even though those documents reviewed by our own—by our Justice Department lawyers didn't feel like it was going to change the verdict. But we delayed until Mr. McVeigh's attorneys have a chance to look at the documents.

Death Penalty

Q. Mr. President, if I can follow up. You know that those documents could have been discovered days after Timothy McVeigh had been executed. You also know that there is some concern about a forensic scientist in Oklahoma City who was involved in a number of death penalty cases, a number of—

The President. Say that again on the forensic scientist?

Q. —in Oklahoma City, who was involved in a number of death penalty cases.

Those inmates happened to be executed. What can you say to the American people——

The President. Well, in this case——

Q. Let me just finish.

The President. Okay, I'm sorry. I beg your pardon. [Laughter]

Q. Thank you, sir. [Laughter]

What can you say or what can you do as President to ensure that, at the Federal/State level, the death penalty is always administered fairly?

The President. Well, at the State level, I encourage Governors to be diligent and to look at all the facts and to make sure that people get full access to the courts and that there is no question about the person's guilt.

At the Federal level, I'm pleased to report, that on the first case that came toward my desk, my administration reacted the way it should have. Which is, given the fact that documents had been misplaced, the Attorney General recommended the delay of the execution until the——Mr. McVeigh's rights were fully vetted; in other words, his lawyers have a chance to look at those documents.

It was the right thing to do. And you bring up a hypothetical, but that's not the way it happened. The way it happened was that the evidence was brought forth, and we made a decision, and it was the correct decision.

Yes, sir.

Situation in the Middle East

Q. Mr. President, you would not equate the baby that was killed in retaliatory Israeli fire in the Gaza Strip with a 13- and 14-year-old Jewish boys, one of them a U.S. citizen, who were tied up, beaten to death, and mutilated near Tekoa, would you?

The President. I was kind of smiling. It sounded kind of like an editorial.

But the death in the Middle East is abhorrent, and our Nation weeps when people lose their lives. And what we must do is work hard to break the cycle of violence. It's going to be very difficult for us to be able to bring people to the peace table so long as there is violence. And we will continue to work to break the cycle of violence.

Tommy [Thomas M. DeFrank, New York Daily News].

United Nations Human Rights Commission

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Did you speak to Secretary-General Annan this morning about the United Nations vote to kick the U.S. off the Human Rights Commission? And if so, what did you tell him?

The President. I did. I told him it was hard for me to envision a Human Rights Commission without the United States on it and Sudan being on it—let me put it that way. We're off, and Sudan is on. I'm not so sure—you know, that sent an awfully, awfully strange signal to the world, it seems like to me.

Yes.

Q. A followup. Did you—or do you believe that some U.S. back dues to the United Nations should be withheld as a result of that vote, as some in Congress were asking?

The President. I do not. I think we have made an agreement with the United Nations, an agreement that had been negotiated in good faith, and I think we ought to pay our dues. Having said that, the decision was an outrageous decision. To me, it undermines the whole credibility of this Commission—to kick the United States off, one of the great bastions of human rights, and allow Sudan to be on. And I think most reasonable people in the world see it that way.

But I did bring up the subject. Thank you for pinning me.

Q. Did he agree?

The President. He listened carefully. Yes, sir.

Energy Policy

Q. Another energy question, if I may, Mr. President.

The President. Please.

Q. What would you tell an American citizen who is suspicious that your energy policy is going to benefit the oil industry, because of your background and Vice President Cheney's background in the industry?

The President. I would tell the American people I'm going to tell the truth when it comes to energy, that we have a serious problem, that we need to do a couple of things. One, we need to encourage the development of technologies to help us conserve. We need to be more conservation minded in America.

But I'm also going to say, as plainly as I can, we won't conserve our way to energy independence. We must also increase supply. It's in the consumer's interests that we do so. The more supply there is, relative to demand, the less the price will be.

And I believe that we can have exploration and sound environmental policy go hand in hand. The only thing I know to do, sir, is to tell the truth the way I see it. And we can play like there's not an energy crisis or hope there's not a problem. There is a problem, and there's a problem that's going to confront this Nation. And my job as the President is to take the problem on and propose the solutions I think necessary to solve the problem. And again, I repeat, it's a combination of good conservation and an increase in supplies. And I believe we can do both.

And so, I think most of the American people understand that. Thank you.

Yes.

Japan

Q. Mr. President, Japan's new Prime Minister, Junichiro Koizumi, has accepted your invitation to visit the United States as early as possible. He now enjoys very good support of more than 80 percent, mainly to his strong commitment to economic reforms in Japan.

The President. Yes.

Q. Mr. President, now are you more optimistic about the future of the second largest economy of the world, or are you still very concerned?

The President. Well, I am concerned, but I am optimistic when I read what the Prime Minister has said about reforms. Now, I believe he's a man who is intent up on reforming the system. I had a good visit with him on the telephone. I look forward to meeting him in person. I look forward to discussing ways in which our important friendship can remain strong. And I look forward to hearing from him what he and his government intend to do to reform the system.

Japan is a very important partner of the United States. And it's not only an economic partner, but it's an important partner to keep stability in the Far East. It's important for us to work closely together, and I look forward to meeting him soon. And I'm confident

we'll have a very good dialog when I'm able to do so.

Thank you all very much. Have a very good weekend.

NOTE: The President's sixth news conference began at 2:04 p.m. in the James S. Brady Briefing Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan; Judge William H. Webster, former Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, who is leading the espionage investigation of Special Agent Robert Philip Hanssen; and President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria.

Memorandum on Cooperation by Vietnam in Accounting for United States Prisoners of War and Missing in Action

May 11, 2001

Presidential Determination No. 2001-15

Memorandum for the Secretary of State

Subject: Cooperation by Vietnam in Accounting for United States Prisoners of War and Missing in Action

As provided under section 610 of the Departments of Commerce, Justice, and State, the Judiciary and Other Independent Agencies Appropriations Act, 2001, as contained in the Consolidated Appropriations Act for FY 2001, Public Law 106-553, I hereby determine, based on all information available to the United States Government, that the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam is fully cooperating in good faith with the United States in the following four areas related to achieving the fullest possible accounting for Americans unaccounted for as a result of the Vietnam War:

- 1) resolving discrepancy cases, live sightings, and field activities;
- 2) recovering and repatriating American remains;
- 3) accelerating efforts to provide documents that will help lead to the fullest possible accounting of POW/MIAs; and,
- 4) providing further assistance in implementing trilateral investigations with Laos.

I further determine that the appropriate